



EARLY ARMENIAN CHRISTIANITY AND EDESSA

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Edessa, Urha in Armenian, is perhaps best known to readers of early Armenian texts as the place where Mashtots went in his quest for an Armenian script.¹ He obviously made this journey because Edessa was then the center of Syriac-speaking Christianity.² It would be useful to review the importance of Syriac-speakers and Syrian Christian traditions in Armenia during the fourth and fifth centuries as well as the adoption of legends concerning the origins of Christianity in Edessa itself and their integration into the Armenian tradition. Although for the most part Armenian sources are relied on, it should be remembered that any written text in Armenian post-dates the conversion of King Trdat and the work of Saint Gregory the

¹ Critical edition of the Armenian text: Manuk Abeghyan, *Vark Mashtotsi* [Life of Mashtots] (Erevan: Haypetrat, 1941); reprinted with English trans. Bedros Norehad, concordance Eliza Demirchyan, and intro. Krikor Maksoudian (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1985). The original Armenian text was revised by subsequent Armenian historians in light of accounts of the career of Mashtots. See the valuable commentary to both versions by Gabriele Winkler, *Koriwns Biographie des Mesrop Mastoc* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1994).

² For the history of Edessa at this period, see Judah B. Segal, *Edessa, 'The Blessed City'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970). For a general view of early Syriac Christianity, see Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). A useful introduction to the literatures of the Eastern Christian churches is *Christianismes orientaux: Introduction à l'étude des langues et des littératures*, ed. Micheline Albert (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1993). There are several relevant articles in *East of Byzantium: Armenia and Syria in the Formative Period*, ed. Nina G. Garsoïan, Thomas F. Mathews, and Robert W. Thomson (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982). Useful for both Syria and Armenia is *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity*, ed. Ken Parry et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

Illuminator by a full century. Therefore conclusions regarding the fourth century will have to remain tentative when not confirmed by outside sources.

The seventeen-hundredth anniversary of the proclamation of Christianity in Armenia was widely celebrated at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Agatangeghos (Agat'angelos) describes this proclamation in terms of King Trdat's turning away from ancient Armenian roots, which were closely related to Iranian religious traditions, towards the West, to the Christian Church of the Roman Empire and to an alliance with the emperor Constantine.³ Whatever the motivation for this dramatic shift and the events surrounding it, one may suggest that the proclamation of Christianity in Armenia in the early fourth century is not the same as the conversion of Armenia.⁴ The claim of Agatangeghos that in seven days after Gregory's return from Caesarea as bishop for Armenia more than 4 million Armenians were baptized and that during his lifetime Gregory actually established a church "in every place" and consecrated more than 400 bishops is surely exaggerated.⁵ It is quite clear from the *Epic Histories* of the *Buzandaran* that Christianity met with much opposition in Armenia. In the first

³ Critical edition of the Armenian text: Galusd Ter-Mkrtchian and Stepan Kanayants, *Agatangeghay Patmutiun Hayots* [Agatangelos' *History of Armenia*] (Tiflis: Mnatsakan Martirosiants, 1909); English trans. of the historical section, with facing Armenian text, by Robert W. Thomson, *Agathangelos: History of the Armenians* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1976). For the long section known as the "Teaching of Saint Gregory" (Armenian text, paragraphs 259-715), see Robert W. Thomson, *The Teaching of Saint Gregory*, rev. ed., with trans., intro., and commentary (New Rochelle, NY: St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, 2001). Numerous conferences have taken place on the proclamation of Christianity in Armenia. For a more general overview of the Christianization of the Caucasus, see the proceedings of an international symposium in Vienna in December 1999, *Die Christianisierung des Kaukasus*, ed. Werner Seibt (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2002).

⁴ The stages of the conversion of Armenia have been sketched in Robert W. Thomson, "Mission, Conversion, and Christianization: The Armenian Example," *Proceedings of the International Congress Commemorating the Millennium of Christianity in Rus-Ukraine* [Harvard Ukrainian Studies 12/13] (Cambridge, MA: 1988-89), pp. 28-45; reprinted in Thomson's Variorum collection, *Studies in Armenian Literature and Christianity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994).

⁵ Agatangeghos, *Patmutiun Hayots*, paragraphs 835, 856. These divisions of the Armenian text are also marked in the English translation. See note 3 above.

book of his *History*, the unknown author of the *Buzandaran* laments of his fellow-countrymen: "When they had taken on the name of Christian . . . they did not receive it with ardent faith, but under duress. Those who were acquainted with Greek or Syriac learning were able to achieve some partial inkling of it. As for those who were without skill in learning and who were the great mass of the people . . . not one of them could keep in mind a single thing of what he had heard." He continues with a description of their traditional, pagan practices.⁶ And referring to the situation at the end of the same century, Koriun, the student and biographer of Mashtots, points to the need for missionary activity in the countryside.⁷ Wholehearted acceptance of a Christian outlook would take some time to achieve.

As regards references to Syriac, Agatangeghos claims that King Trdat had established schools where children were to be instructed in the art of writing, some being set to Syriac and others to Greek.⁸ The same actions are attributed to the Catholicos Nerses I (353-73) in the *Buzandaran*.⁹ However, referring to the work of Mashtots, Koriun merely says that some of his disciples were sent to Syria in order to make translations from that language into Greek, not that schools for Syriac existed in Armenia.¹⁰ The comments of Ghazar Parpetsi (Lazarus of Parp) are more relevant. Describing the concern of Mashtots that Armenian could not yet be written down, he emphasizes that the youth of Armenia had to go on long

⁶ There are numerous Armenian editions of the *Buzandaran Patmutiunk*, attributed to an unknown Pavstos, but there is no critical edition to date. The edition by Kerovbe Patkanian, *Pavstosi Buzandatsvoy Patmutiun Hayots* [Pavstos Buzand's *History of Armenia*] (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1883), has been reprinted with introduction by Nina G. Garsoïan (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1984). For an English translation with comprehensive commentary, see Nina G. Garsoïan, *The Epic Histories (Buzandaran Patmut'iwunk')* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). In that translation the page numbers of the Armenian edition published in Venice in 1933 by the Mekhitarist Press are indicated. See Bk III, ch. 13, for the quoted passage. The *Buzandaran* begins at Book III; for the question of Books I and II of the collection, see Garsoïan's introduction.

⁷ See Koriun, *Vark Mashtotsi*, ch. 5, for the first foray of Mashtots to Goghtn.

⁸ Agatangeghos, *Patmutiun Hayots*, par. 840.

⁹ *Buzandaran*, Bk IV, ch. 4.

¹⁰ Koriun, *Vark Mashtotsi*, ch. 19.

journeys to learn Syriac: "For the worship of the church and the readings of scripture were conducted in Syriac in the hermitages and churches of the Armenian people. But the congregations of such a large country were quite unable to comprehend or profit from it."¹¹ This is an overstatement if Armenia as a whole is meant. Movses Khorenatsi has a clearer statement. Referring to the later establishment of schools by Mashtots and Catholicos Sahak, he says: "[Mashtots] instructed the entire area of the Persian sector [of Armenia], but not the Greek part where they used the Greek script and not Syriac."¹² That many Armenians were familiar with Syriac, but not Greek, is indicated by the fact that when Mashtots sent pupils to Edessa to make translations, after the successful invention of the script, they did not need to learn that language first, whereas they had to learn Greek before embarking on translations from that language.¹³

In other words, Syriac was widely used in areas of Armenia subject to the Persian shahs, especially in the provinces along the frontier in northern Mesopotamia. But in northern and western Armenia that language was less well known, Greek being the dominant tongue for reading and writing. Once the Armenian script had taken hold, the use of Armenian as the common language for ecclesiastical purposes was possible. The continuing influence of Syriac, nonetheless, was significant.

¹¹ Critical edition of the Armenian text: Galust Ter-Mkrtchian and Stepan Malkhasian, *Ghazaray Parpetsyoy Patmutiun Hayots ev Tught ar Vahan Mamikonian* [Ghazar Parpetetsi's *History of Armenia and Letter to Vahan Mamikonian*] (Tiflis: Mnatsakan Martirosiants, 1904); reprinted with intro. and critical bibliography by Dickran Kouymjian (Delmar: Caravan Books, 1985), p. 13; English trans. Robert W. Thomson, *The History of Lazar P'arpec'i* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991). The page numbers of the Armenian edition are marked in the translation.

¹² Critical edition of the Armenian text: Manuk Abeghian and Set Harutiunian, *Movsisi Khorenatsvoy Patmutiun Hayots* [Movses Khorenatsi's *History of Armenia*] (Tiflis: Mnatsakan Martirosiants, 1913); reprinted with intro. Robert W. Thomson (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1981); reprinted with additional variants by Ashot B. Sargsyan (Erevan: Matenadaran, 1991). English trans. Robert W. Thomson, *Moses Khorenats'i: History of the Armenians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); more recent bibliography in the French translation by Annie and Jean-Pierre Mahé, *Histoire de l'Arménie par Moïse de Khorène* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993). See Bk III, ch. 54, for the quotation.

¹³ See Koriun, *Vark Mashtotsi*, ch. 19.

The direct missionary efforts that brought Christianity to Armenia at large must be examined. When describing the work of Mashtots as preacher and missionary in the Armenian provinces, Koriun paints a clear picture. The potential missionary first devoted himself to spiritual discipline as an ascetic hermit. As he gained renown, pupils began to attach themselves in order to learn from the master the path of spiritual progress. They moved around as a group and by their preaching endeavored to turn the local inhabitants from their pagan traditions. Koriun describes how Mashtots went first to Goghtn. The prince of that region, Shabit, was already a Christian and gave these visiting holy men his support. Koriun does not suggest that Shabit himself had previously put any pressure on his people to convert.¹⁴

The role of the itinerant holy man, working miracles that authenticated his mission, did not begin with Mashtots. Earlier examples are described in some detail in the *Buzandaran*, from which it is clear that the majority of such persons were themselves Syrian or were associated with Syria. The most important of these was Daniel, the bishop of Taron, a Syrian by origin. He was famous for preaching not only in his own diocese but also in foreign regions under Persian control. The author of the *Buzandaran* describes his amazing ascetic prodigies and refers elsewhere to several of his pupils.¹⁵ These were teachers (*vardapets*) mostly in southern Armenia in the regions bordering on Syriac-speaking Christianity, but some moved further north.¹⁶ The work of Daniel's disciples along the Euphrates is emphasized in the *Buzandaran*. The author notes that they lived in hermitages and led groups of followers who were devoted to an ascetic life.¹⁷ These ascetics and their disciples traveled in many regions, turning large numbers to the truth. An organized, more static coenobitic monasticism

¹⁴ Cf. Koriun, *Vark Mashtotsi*, ch. 5, and Movses Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*, Bk III, ch. 47.

¹⁵ See *Buzandaran*, Bk III, ch. 14, and, for his disciples, Bk V, chs. 25-28, Bk VI, chs. 7, 16.

¹⁶ The office of *vardapet* was not so strictly regulated in the early period as later (in the *Lawcode* of Mkhitar Gosh, for example). For the term, see Robert W. Thomson, "Vardapet in the Early Armenian Church," *Le Muséon* 75 (1962): 367-84.

¹⁷ See *Buzandaran*, Bk III, ch. 14, Bk V, chs. 25-28, Bk VI, chs. 7, 16.

had not yet developed in fourth-century Armenia.¹⁸

In other words, the development of a Christian ethos was not brought about primarily by the bishops of the different dioceses founding local churches. There was no diocesan network along the lines of the organized system in the Roman Empire, with bishops in the larger towns and priests in the dependent villages. Such an urban configuration was foreign to Armenia.¹⁹ The leading noble families provided the bishops, though their number was quite modest to judge from those named in the *Buzandaran*, other early texts, and the signatories to Armenian Church councils.²⁰ Of parish organization there is little evidence, the priests themselves being drawn from the local communities and not imposed from outside (to judge from later canon law). At this early stage, the task of bringing the populace into the Christian fold was to a large extent carried out by itinerant preachers. And their leaders quite often were of Syrian origin.²¹

¹⁸ For the earliest evidence of monasticism in Armenia, see Robert W. Thomson, "Monks and Monasteries," being Appendix 2 to his translation of Ghazar Parpetsi (see note 11 above), and Nina Garsoïan's discussion of the terms *mianjn* (*miandzn*) and *vank* in her translation of *Epic Histories*, pp. 547, 566-67. Garabed Amadouni is uncritical in his use of early sources in his "Le rôle historique des hiéromaines arméniens," in *Il monachesimo orientale* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1958), pp. 279-305, with references to his earlier works.

¹⁹ See Nina G. Garsoïan, "The Early Mediaeval Armenian City: An Alien Element?" *Ancient Studies in Memory of Elias Bickermann*, as a special edition of *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 16-17 (1984-1985): 67-83; reprinted in her Variorum collection, *Church and Culture in Early Medieval Armenia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999).

²⁰ For the early Armenian Church councils, see *Kanonagirk Hayots* [Book of Armenian Canon Law], vol. 1, ed. Vazgen Hakobyan (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1964). The second volume (1971) contains the proceedings of councils held after the time of Hovhannes Odznetsi (Catholicos, 717-28), who was responsible for the compilation in the first volume. On this collection, see Aram Mardirossian, *Le livre des canons arméniens (Kanonagirk' Hayoc') de Yovhannēs Awjnec 'i: Eglise, droit et société en Arménie du IV^e au VIII^e siècle* (Peters: Leuven, 2004).

²¹ The supposed role of Syrians in the time of Saint Gregory the Illuminator as described in the *History of Taron* attributed to Zenob of the Monastery of Glak must not be taken seriously. The work is a tendentious and pious composition, not predating the tenth century. See Levon Avdoyan, *Pseudo-Yovhannēs Mamikonean: The History of Taron [Patmut'iwn Taronoy]: Historical Investigation, Critical Translation, and Historical and Textual Commentaries* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).

It is in this context that Mashtots' own work must be viewed. He was the holy man par excellence, whose invention of a script enabled the previously variant traditions of Greek and Syrian origin to be welded into an original and specifically Armenian amalgam. What were the main Syrian strands in this new entity?

Several points may be noted. The first is linguistic, that is, the continuing use of Syriac words and expressions taken over into Armenian. Some of these words remain in use to the present day, such as *kahana* for "priest," *tsom* for "fast," *abegha* for "monk," as opposed to borrowings from Greek such as *katoghikos*, originally used for "metropolitan bishop," *episkopos*, and many others.²² Sometimes a Syriac expression has been literally translated, bringing a new sense into Armenian. Thus the verb *pahel*, "to hold" or "to keep," takes on the sense of "fasting," from the use of the equivalent in Syriac, *n^etar*.

Another interesting Syriacism is the use in early canons of the expression, *ukhti mankunk* (children of the covenant), for clergy. In Syriac this expression, children of the covenant, *bnay q^eyama*, referred to a category of laity rather than clergy. They were people who had devoted their lives to chastity but lived in the world rather than monastic seclusion. In the translation of the Syriac writer Afrahat, *bnay q^eyama* is rendered *ukhtavor*, literally "one who has taken a vow," which is a common Armenian word for "clergy."²³ But later the specific Syriac meaning of "children of the covenant" was lost, and the expression *ukhti mankunk* could be used for clergy. The term has a long history in Armenian and can be used not only for

²² A helpful listing of Greek and Syriac vocabulary in Armenian may be found in Heinrich Hübschmann, *Armenische Grammatik*, Pt. 1: *Armenische Etymologie* (Leipzig, 1897; reprinted Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1972), pp. 281-321 for Syriac, and pp. 322-89 for Greek. For Armenian nomenclature, see also Nina G. Garsoïan, "Notes préliminaires sur l'anthroponomie arménienne du moyen âge," *L'anthroponomie: Document de l'histoire sociale des mondes méditerranéens médiévaux* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1996), pp. 227-39.

²³ The Armenian version of Afrahat's homilies (attributed in Armenia to Jacob of Nisibis) has been edited by Guy Lafontaine, *La version arménienne des oeuvres d'Aphraate le Syrien* (Louvain: Peeters, 1977-1980).

clergy but also for dedicated members of the Church.²⁴

The influence of Syrian writings in Armenia is obvious in several areas. Koriun emphasizes that the pupils of Mashtots were active in translating, though he does not name the individual Syrian authors translated. Their first concern was with the Bible. The initial rendering of the Gospels and of many other books of the Bible was from Syriac, and this translation was later revised based on the Greek texts.²⁵ It would have taken many years to render into Armenian not only the biblical texts mentioned by Koriun but also the works of noted Syrian authors such as Ephrem and Afrahat, in addition to a large number of lives of saints and martyrs.²⁶ Not surprisingly, Armenians continued to study in Edessa after the early-fifth-century visit by Mashtots' scholarly disciples Hovsep and Eznik, as is clear from a non-Armenian source. One of the documents submitted to the second Council of Ephesus in 449 was signed by local authorities, including representatives of the "schools" of the Syrians, Persians (that

²⁴ The varied use of this Armenian expression has been investigated by Erna Shirinyan. See her "Reflections on the 'Sons and Daughters of the Covenant' in the Armenian Sources," *Revue des études arméniennes*, n.s., 28 (2001-2002): 261-85. She refers for the Syriac term to George Nedungatt, "The Covenanters of the Early Syriac-Speaking Church," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39 (1973): 191-215, 419-44. For the Syrian *bnay q'yama*, see also Sidney Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria," in *Asceticism*, ed. Vincent Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 220-45.

²⁵ It would not be possible here to summarize the enormous literature of the Armenian version of the Bible. A useful overview may be found in the introduction by Claude Cox to Hovhannes Zohrapian, ed., *Astvatsashunch: Matian Hin ev Nor Ktakaranats* [The Bible: Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1805; reprinted Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1984). See also Charles Renoux, "Langue et littérature arméniennes," in *Christianismes orientaux*, pp. 126-30, for the Bible.

²⁶ For these translations, see, in general, Levon Ter-Petrosian, *Ancient Armenian Translations* (New York: St. Vartan Press, 1992). For details of published texts and secondary literature, see Robert W. Thomson, *A Bibliography of Classical Armenian Literature to 1500 AD* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), pp. 29-88, "Translations into Armenian." Some of the major works translated from Syriac into Armenian are noted by Robert W. Thomson, "Syrian Christianity and the Conversion of Armenia," in *Die Christianisierung des Kaukasus*, pp. 159-69. Not everything attributed to the influential Ephrem was genuine. See Edward G. Mathews, *The Armenian Commentary on Genesis Attributed to Ephrem the Syrian* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), and his succeeding editions of commentaries on the Old Testament ascribed to Ephrem.

is, Christian Syrians from Persian territory), and Armenians.²⁷

Works originally composed in Greek but already available in Syriac were also translated. The most influential of these was probably the *Ecclesiastical History* by Eusebius of Caesarea, who was regarded by later Armenian historians as the model Greek historian and with whom Movses Khorenatsi could be compared among the Armenians.²⁸ A serious study of the influence of Ephrem or Afrahat on Armenian authors is still lacking, but the impact of Syrian hagiography on Armenian historians such as Eghishe has been noted by Levon Ter-Petrosyan among others.²⁹

This is not the place to deal with the theological questions involved in the relationship of the Armenian and Syrian churches in the fifth and sixth centuries before the final split between Constantinople and Armenia. These issues were first discussed in detail in the well-known work by Ervand Ter-Minasiants, written in 1904 and titled in English translation, *The Relationship of the Armenian Church with the Syrian Church up to the End of the Thirteenth Century*.³⁰ The study

²⁷ See Nina G. Garsoïan, *L'Eglise arménienne et le grand schisme d'Orient* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), p. 69.

²⁸ Movses Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*, Bk II, ch. 10, claims that Mashtots himself had the *Ecclesiastical History* translated into Armenian. There is no independent verification of this, but it was certainly one of the earliest translations made. After the tenth century many Armenian historians and chroniclers began their own works with a review of earlier histories. Eusebius is mentioned as the foremost of the Greek writers, as Movses is the foremost of the Armenian historians. For Movses Khorenatsi as "the equal of Eusebius," see Asoghik [Stepannos of Taron], Bk I, ch. 1. Armenian text: *Stepannos Taronetsvoy Patmutiun tiezerakan* [*Universal History* of Stepannos of Taron], ed. Stepan Malkhasian (St. Petersburg, 1885); French translation of Books I and II, Edouard Dulaurier, *Etienne Açogh'ig de Daron, Histoire Universelle* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1883), and of Bk III, Frédéric Macler, *Etienne Asofik de Taron, Histoire Universelle* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1917).

²⁹ Levon Ter-Petrosyan, *Abrahamu Khostovanoghi 'Vokayk Arevelitse'* [The "Martyrs of the East" of Abraham the Confessor] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1976), where the influence of these Syriac martyrdoms on Armenian hagiography is discussed. For the articles of Ter-Petrosyan on the impact of Syriac texts on Armenian writers, see the "Index of Modern Authors," in Thomson, *Bibliography*, p. 321.

³⁰ *Die armenische Kirche in ihren Beziehungen zu der syrischen Kirche* (Leipzig, 1904); Armenian version, *Hayots ekeghetsii haraberutiunnere asorvots ekeghetsineri het* (Echmiadzin: Mother See, 1908), reprinted recently without indication of place or date.

was epoch-making, as Ter-Minasiants was able to use the extensive correspondence between Armenians and Greeks, Syrians, and Georgians—the famous *Girk Tghtots* (Book of Letters)—first published in 1901.³¹ There is now an exhaustive study of the Armenian-Syrian relationship based on original documents in Nina Garsoïan's *L'Eglise arménienne et le grand schisme d'Orient*.³²

As for the impact of Syrian church architecture in Armenia, one might note the early basilica types, such as Ereruk (east of the Akhurian River), before the domed cross became the more or less standard Armenian style.³³ Related to the architectural style of a church is, of course, the liturgical ritual of that church. In this regard, Gabriele Winkler has demonstrated the early impact of Syrian traditions, especially in baptismal rites, before the codification of Armenian practice.³⁴ As with the translation of the Bible, it is possible to discern layers of influence in liturgical texts. The influence of Syrian Christianity is often found at the earliest level. But ecclesiastical architecture and liturgical practice are not so directly tied to Edessa as are the translations from Syriac. The liturgical

³¹ *Girk Tghtots*, ed. Hovsep Izmiriants (Tiflis: Rotinians Press, 1901). The second edition by Norayr Pogharian (Jerusalem: Saint James Press, 1994), changes the order of the individual letters.

³² See note 26 above. Garsoïan has translated the Armenian correspondence with the Greeks, Syrians, and Georgians into French. There is as yet no translation of all the documents in the collection, nor is there a study of its compilation over the centuries.

³³ See *Ererouk*, ed. Pascal Paboudjian and Adriano Alpago-Novello, [Documents of Armenian Architecture, 9] (Milan: Edizioni Ares, 1977). The literature on Armenian church architecture is too extensive to be surveyed here. For a competent introduction, see Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978). The Syrian connection is discussed in Armen Khatchatrian, *L'Architecture arménienne du IV^e au VI^e siècle* (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1971). For a review of Khatchatrian's views, see Christina Maranci, *Medieval Armenian Architecture: Constructions of Race and Nation* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 194-207.

³⁴ See *The Armenian Christian Tradition*, ed. Robert F. Taft (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1997); Gabriele Winkler, *Über die Entwicklungsgeschichte des armenischen Symbolums* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2000); idem, *Das armenische Initiationsrituale* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1982); Hans-Jürgen Feulner, Elena Velkovska, and Robert F. Taft, eds., *Crossroads of Cultures: Studies in Liturgy and Patristics in Honor of Gabriele Winkler* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2000).

connection is primarily with Jerusalem.³⁵

It is necessary to turn back to consider traditions about origins, for such matters are important in church history. How are the origins of the Armenian Church linked to Syria in later Armenian tradition, if Saint Gregory the Illuminator is recognized as the founder of the Armenian Church? From earliest days churches were honored by the antiquity of their foundation and possible association with the Apostles. The local bishops traced their predecessors back as far as possible. Needless to say, the antiquity of each bishopric could not always be verified, and as Christendom expanded there were clearly churches existing in areas never visited by the original Apostles.³⁶ One of the cities where the origin of its church was obscure was Edessa. Even by the year 201 only one church building is recorded,³⁷ despite the later importance of that city which gave its local dialect as Syriac to the burgeoning Syrian Church. But here, as elsewhere, pious imagination filled a void. By the beginning of the fourth century, the historian Eusebius records the story of Abgar and Jesus. Abgar, king of Edessa, suffered from pains (later described as gout); on hearing of the miracles being worked by Jesus he sent a letter to him, asking for healing. The Savior did not himself come to Edessa but promised to send one of his disciples to heal Abgar and bring him and his family the gift of eternal life. After the Resurrection, Tadeos (Thaddeus), known as Addai in the Syriac version, was sent to Edessa and duly converted Abgar.³⁸

³⁵ In this regard a great deal of new material has recently been published, notably by Charles Renoux and Gabriele Winkler. Other aspects are covered in *The Armenians in Jerusalem and the Holy Land*, eds. Michael E. Stone, Roberta R. Ervine, and Nira Stone (Leuven: Peeters, 2002). See also Robert W. Thomson, "Jerusalem and Armenia" [Papers of the 1983 Oxford Patristic Conference, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone], *Studia Patristica* 18 (1986): 77-91, reprinted in his *Studies in Armenian Literature and Christianity*.

³⁶ For a general view of the subject, see Francis Dvornik, *The Idea of Apostolicity in Byzantium and the Legend of the Apostle Andrew* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958).

³⁷ Segal, *Edessa*, p. 69. The church is mentioned in the *Chronicle of Edessa*, ed. Ignazio Guidi (Louvain: Peeters 1903), pp. 1-13.

³⁸ *Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. Kirsopp Lake (Loeb Classical Library) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926, reprinted

As time passed the story became ever more elaborate, involving an image of Jesus which was kept in Edessa and numerous other expansions.³⁹ Although attempts have been made to associate this story with the conversion to Christianity of a later King Abgar, not the one living in the time of Jesus, the tale has no basis in fact. It is what might be called a "foundation myth." Armenians no doubt became familiar with it even before Mashtots went to Edessa. In the fifth century they certainly could read about it in the Armenian translation of Eusebius. Moreover, the much more elaborate Syriac version of the tale, known as "The Teaching of Addai," was also translated into Armenian.⁴⁰ In the process, however, a very significant addition was made. According to the Syriac tradition, Addai died in Edessa after ordaining his successor, whereas the Armenian version has him going to the north and founding the first church in Armenia. There, he was martyred by King Sanatruk.⁴¹ Thus in the *Buzandaran* the patriarchal throne is called the "throne of Tadeos,"⁴² even though there was a hiatus of more than two centuries between this purported visit of Tadeos and the activity of Saint Gregory the

1959), Bk I, ch. 13. For the Armenian translation of *The Ecclesiastical History*, see Abraham Charian, *Patmutiun Ekeghetsvoy Eusebiosi Kesaratsvoy* (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1877).

³⁹ See Segal, *Edessa*, pp. 76-78; Averil Cameron, "The History of the Image of Edessa," *Okeanos: Essays Presented to Ihor Sevcenko* [Harvard Ukrainian Studies 7] (1983), pp. 80-94, reprinted in her *Changing Cultures in Early Byzantium* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996). Timothy Greenwood drew my attention to the reference in the *Martyrdom of Vahan of Goghtn* to the saint worshiping this "saving image" on his way to the caliph. For the Armenian text, see *Vkayabanutiun srboyn Vahanay Goghtnatsvoy* (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1854), p. 34.

⁴⁰ For the Syriac, see *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus*, trans. Alain Desreumaux (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993); for the Armenian (where the author of the story is called Labubna), see Ghevond Alishan, *Labubneay divanagir dpri Edesioy Tught Abgaru* [Letter of Abgar by the Archivist Labubna of Edessa] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1868), and the French translation as *Lettre d'Abgar, ou Histoire de la conversion des Edeséens par Laboubnia* (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1868).

⁴¹ This tradition is recorded in the very first sentence of the *Buzandaran*, Bk III, ch. 1. For the Armenian texts of the martyrdom, see vol. 8 in the Soperk series (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1853). See also Michel van Esbroeck, "Le roi Sanatrouk et l'apôtre Thaddée," *Revue des études arméniennes*, n.s., 8 (1971): 13-167.

⁴² For example, *Buzandaran*, Bk III, ch. 12 (of Husik succeeding to the throne), Bk IV, ch. 3 (of Nerses succeeding).

Illuminator.

Movses Khorenatsi actually makes Abgar an Armenian king, an innovation which was generally accepted by later Armenian writers. But his identification of figures in the story of Edessa's conversion with Bagratuni nobles, and the counter-claim of his rival, Tovma Artsruni, that it was an Artsruni who was baptized by Tadeos to become the first Armenian Christian, did not enter into the mainstream of Armenian tradition.⁴³

The adaptation to Armenia of the Syrian legend of Thaddeus reflects the need felt by some to push back the origins of Christianity in their country. Tadeos was adopted from Edessa because of the strong influence of Syrian Christian traditions. Thaddeus, however, was not one of the original twelve Apostles. Once the legends of the travels of the Apostles all over the world had gained credence, then Bartholomew was appropriated as the apostolic founder of the Church in Armenia—though again there was a long hiatus between apostolic times and the work of Gregory, who by universal agreement was considered the real father of Armenian Christianity.⁴⁴ By contrast, the Aghvank to the northeast traced their church back to Elisaeus (Eghishe), a disciple of Tadeos, who became for them “the Illuminator of the East.”⁴⁵

The adaptation of the foundation myth of Edessa, which was the center of Syriac-speaking Christianity, illustrates well

⁴³ Movses Khorenatsi, Bk II, chs. 26-36 for Abgar, Tadeos, and Sanatruk; Tovma Artsruni, Bk I, ch. 6; Armenian text of Tovma: *Tovmayi vardapeti Artsrunvoy Patmutiun Tann Artsrunats*, ed. Kerovbe Patkanian (St. Petersburg: Skorokhodov Press, 1887); reprinted with intro. Robert W. Thomson (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1991); English trans. Robert W. Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni: History of the House of the Artsrunik* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985).

⁴⁴ Movses Khorenatsi, Bk II, ch. 34, is the first Armenian historian to claim that Bartholomew came to Armenia. See, in general, Michel van Esbroeck, “La naissance du culte de saint Barthélémy en Arménie,” *Revue des études arméniennes*, n.s., 17 (1983): 171-99.

⁴⁵ Movses Daskhurantsi [Kaghankatuatsi], *Patmutiun Aghvanits Ashkharhi* [History of the Land of the Aghvans], ed. Varag Arakelyan (Erevan: Matenadaran, 1983), Bk I, ch. 6; English trans. Charles J.F. Dowsett, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movsēs Daxuranci* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). From the thirteenth century, see also Kirakos Gandzaketsi, *Patmutiun Hayots*, ed. K.A. Melik-Ohanjanyan (Erevan: Matenadaran, 1961), pp. 192-94.

the deep and persistent influence in Armenia of Syrian Christian traditions. The complexities of the interaction between Armenians and Syrians in the early centuries of the Armenian Church deserve further investigation.